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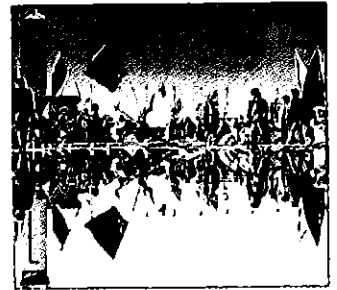
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CHAPTER NINETEEN

REVOLUTIONS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



REVOLUTIONS HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT SOME OF THE MOST momentous social changes in world history over the past two centuries. The American and French Revolutions, of 1776 and 1789 respectively, were the most important eighteenth-century revolutions. The ideals of those who led these revolutions—liberty, universal citizenship, and equality—have now become fundamental modern political values. But to have proclaimed them at all only two hundred years ago—and to suppose that they could be realized through mass action—represented a profound historical innovation. In previous eras, only idealistic dreamers had ventured to suggest that human beings could establish a social order in which political participation would be open to everyone.

The term **revolution** came to be employed in its modern sense at about the same time as that of **democracy**. It was not widely used until the success of the American and French struggles made clear that some new political process was afoot in the world. The European writer with more insight than anyone else about the United States and France at that period, Alexis de Tocqueville, observed: “What, to start with, had seemed to European monarchs and statesmen a mere passing phase, a not unusual symptom of a nation’s grow-

ing pains, was now discovered to be something absolutely new, quite unlike any previous movement, and so widespread, extraordinary, and incalculable as to baffle human understanding" (Tocqueville, 1955).

At that time, "revolution" still carried a strong remnant of its original meaning, to "move in a circle" (the sense in which we still speak of the revolution of a wheel when a vehicle is in motion). The American and French revolutionary leaders, in fact, believed that they were "turning back" to a natural order of things. Human beings were born free and equal, but had been oppressed by the rule of kings and other self-appointed authorities; revolution was the means of restoring that happy, natural condition. In some respects, therefore, the innovative nature of the American and French revolutions was not apparent even to those who had played the greatest part in bringing them about.

As it became more and more obvious that at least some of the resulting changes were permanent, and as the influence of the ideals for which the revolutionaries had fought spread, "revolution" came increasingly to refer to mass action taken with the objective of bringing about fundamental social reconstruction (Abrams, 1982). Although some revolutions since then have been prompted by a concern with restoring a preexisting form of society (such as the Islamic revolution in contemporary Iran), the idea of revolution has been overwhelmingly associated with progress—representing a break with the past in order to establish a new order for the future (Arendt, 1977).

What is a revolution? What are the social conditions that lead to a process of revolutionary change? How should we best analyze movements of protest or rebellion? These are the main questions we shall concentrate upon in this chapter. We cannot understand revolution without knowing about the conditions under which revolutionary change occurs. Hence we shall look at several revolutions in some detail before discussing theories about radical political change and the impact of social movements.

The underlying theme of the whole chapter concerns *the roots of social protest*. Revolution is a particularly important example of mass protest operating outside orthodox political channels. But there are many other, more limited, situations in which uprisings or outbreaks of social violence occur—in the actions of street crowds, for example, or mass demonstrations. We shall also ask what prompts such activity and discuss how the behavior of individuals in crowds differs from their ordinary, everyday conduct.

Social movements—loose associations of people working collectively to achieve shared ends—play a key role in revolution. Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, the existence of such movements,



The democracy movement of 1989–1990 spread throughout Eastern Europe and forced Communist-led governments to relinquish their power. Here, part of the Berlin Wall that had divided this German city for almost thirty years is destroyed.

which receive mass support, is a defining characteristic of revolutions. However, as with mass action, social movements come into being in many other situations besides those of a revolutionary character. Besides political movements, we find religious movements, nationalist movements, women's movements, peace movements, ethnic movements, and very many others. All social movements are in some way oriented to change, although this might be a move backward (as in the case, for instance, of fundamentalist religious movements), rather than progressive. Classifying the different types of social movement, and explaining why social movements arise, are tasks we undertake in the closing parts of the chapter.

DEFINING REVOLUTION

AS A FIRST STEP, WE NEED TO DEFINE REVOLUTION SINCE everyday uses of the term vary widely. A *coup d'état*, which replaces one group of leaders by another without any changes in the existing political structure; for example, would not be an example of revolution in sociological terminology. For a set of events to be regarded as a revolution, they have to have several characteristics.

1. A revolution is a *mass social movement*. This serves to exclude instances in which either a party comes to power through electoral processes, or a small group, such as army leaders, seize power.
2. A revolution leads to *major processes of reform or change* (Skocpol, 1979). This means that those who seize state power must genuinely be more capable of governing the society over which they assume control than those they have overthrown (Dunn, 1972). The leadership must be capable of achieving at least some of its targets. A society in which a movement succeeds in gaining the formal trappings of power, but then is unable effectively to rule, cannot be said to have experienced a revolution; it is likely rather to be a society in chaos, or threatened with disintegration.
3. A revolution includes the *threat or use of violence* by those participating in the mass movement. Revolutions are political changes brought about in the face of opposition by existing

authorities, who cannot be persuaded to relinquish their power without the threatened or actual use of violence.

Assembling the three criteria together, we can define a **revolution** as *the seizure of state power through violent means by the leaders of a mass movement, where that power is subsequently used to initiate major processes of social reform.*

Revolutions differ from armed **rebellions**, which involve the threat or use of violence, but do not lead to substantial change. Until around three hundred years ago, the majority of uprisings were rebellions rather than revolutions. In medieval Europe, for example, serfs or peasants sometimes rose up in protest against the policies of the aristocracy (Scott, 1986; Zagorin, 1982). However, their objectives almost invariably were to secure more favorable treatment, or to replace a particularly tyrannical individual by someone less harsh. The idea of action taken to alter radically the existing political structure of society, that is, revolution, was virtually unthought of.

REVOLUTIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

ALMOST ALL TWENTIETH-CENTURY REVOLUTIONS HAVE happened in developing societies, such as Mexico, Turkey, Egypt, Vietnam, Cuba, and Nicaragua, not in the industrial nations (Moore, 1965). The revolutions that have had the most profound consequences for the world in this century were the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949. Both took place in heavily rural, peasant societies, although Russia was beginning to industrialize. We shall begin our analysis of revolution by looking at these two cases and then at the revolution in Cuba.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Prior to 1917, Russia was an economically backward society autocratically ruled by the tsars (emperors). The society was not completely stagnant, however. It had large armies, a well-organized civil service, and some large cities in which trade and manufacture were firmly established. Nonetheless, most of the population lived in rural poverty and the tsarist regime was for the most part dictatorial, making extensive use of a secret police and informers to suppress dissidents.

Serfdom (a system in which peasants were legally bound to a lord and his land) was not abolished in Russia until after 1860. The decision of the government to free the serfs was part of an attempt to modernize a society no longer able to compete militarily with the leading European powers. Russia had been the loser in the Crimean War of 1854–1855, and again lost in a war with the Japanese, fought in 1905. Largely in response to these defeats, programs of investment in industrial development were instituted, including the building of many new roads and railways. The Russian economy had some success but the tsarist government was too autocratic to permit the thorough social reforms that were taking place in the European countries.

Russia by 1905 was already a society under considerable tension. The beginnings of rapid industrialization had produced a developing class of industrial workers whose conditions of life were sometimes as miserable as those of most of the peasantry. Prevented from organizing effective unions, and completely excluded from political influence, the industrial workers became increasingly hostile to the government. For a far longer period, there had been growing hostility to the tsars among some sectors of the peasantry. During the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, there was a series of uprisings led by workers and some members of the armed forces disillusioned with the progress of the war. But that unrest was quelled when the government rapidly signed a peace treaty with the Japanese, disciplined



Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924), here speaking to crowds in Moscow, led the Russian Revolution.

the dissident troops, and brought them back to crush the rebels. Tsar Nicholas II introduced a few reforms, including the establishment of a representative parliament, but retracted them once he felt his power was again secure.

Between 1905 and 1917 discontent among industrial workers and peasants again became pronounced, with many strikes occurring. Some of these were led by the Bolsheviks, the most openly revolutionary party among a number of others that professed allegiance to socialism or Marxism. The influence of such parties increased during the early years of the First World War (1914–1918), a conflict in which Russia again fared badly—with much more serious consequences than before. Russia had 15 million men in its armies but, because of its lack of economic resources, was unable to equip them well enough to counter the Germans. Several million men were either killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, and a high proportion of officers were killed.

Food and fuel shortages became extreme among the civilian population as the war effort drained the country's resources. The wealthy as well as the poor started to turn decisively against the government. The tsar, continuing to exercise his privileges as absolute ruler, and guided by his adviser Rasputin, became more and more isolated from other groups in the country. In March 1917, workers and soldiers in the capital of Petrograd initiated a series of strikes and riots that rapidly spread through the western part of the country. Nicholas II was forced to abdicate and a new provisional government was set up.

The army, meanwhile, had more or less disintegrated, most of the soldiers returning to their home villages, towns, and cities. Peasants began to forcibly take over land from the larger landowners, and the provisional government was unable to contain continuing unrest and violence among workers and demobilized soldiers. Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, determined to seize power, using as his slogan "Peace and Bread, Peace and Land"—an appeal to both the urban workers and the peasantry. In October 1917, the Bolsheviks forcibly dismissed the provisional government. Reorganizing and remobilizing the armed forces as the new Red Army, and successfully emerging from a period of bitter civil war, the new Soviet government set about implementing fundamental social changes, laying the basis for what has since become the second most powerful industrial and military power in the world (Carr, 1970).

The Russian Revolution was unusual in certain ways. The uprisings that initially undermined the tsarist regime were more spontaneous, and occurred on a larger scale, than in most other revolutions this century. At the beginning of 1917, not even the Bolsheviks anticipated that a successful revolution would be brought about within

such as a short period of time. Yet the Russian Revolution teaches us a good deal about modern revolutions in general. Many revolutions have taken place against the background of war. A prolonged war places strain on the political and social institutions and, if conducted ineptly, is likely to result in a sharply declining level of support for the government. Disaffection within the armed forces removes the major instrument that a regime uses to subdue those who oppose it. Another important element was the role of the peasantry. Before the Russian Revolution, many (including Lenin) believed peasants to be an almost completely conservative force, wedded to traditional ways of life, and unlikely to join any movement for radical social change. This assumption was shown to be false: in this and subsequent twentieth-century revolutions, peasants have been directly involved.

REVOLUTION IN CHINA

Although much of what is now the Soviet Union is in Asia, Russia was always culturally oriented towards Europe. This was not true of China, which was culturally and geographically remote from the West until the nineteenth century. The development of steel-built passenger and cargo ships enabling extensive long-distance trade, combined with the colonizing of parts of the country by Western powers, broke down this separation between West and East. However, the continuity of the Chinese imperial state, stretching back at least two thousand years, remained unbroken until after the turn of the present century. Indeed, although some processes of modernization had been promoted within the government, much of Chinese society on the eve of the 1949 Communist revolution still followed long-established, traditional ways of life.

While China was too large for any Western power to attempt to colonize it completely, the impact of the extensive trading relations with the European states in the nineteenth century undermined the established economy. Largely because of the unfavorable conditions of trade imposed upon China, the imperial government in the late nineteenth century found itself increasingly impoverished. Unable to repay debts to *European creditors*, the government increased its taxation of the peasantry, which resulted in frequent riots and rebellions among peasants. In many parts of the enormous country, particularly where central political control had always been weak, warlords and bandits ruled unchecked. Although the Chinese believed deeply in the superiority of their civilization to all others, they were regularly humiliated by both the European states and the Japanese. China lost various territories in central and southeast Asia. The country was also



Mao Tse-tung (1893–1976) led the Chinese Revolution and established the Marxist-based People's Republic of China in 1949.

defeated in successive military encounters with the British, French, and Japanese.

In 1911 a major uprising forced the emperor to abdicate. Although sometimes spoken of as a “revolution,” the events of 1911 and 1912 did not establish a government capable of unifying the country and promoting effective reforms. A Chinese Republic was set up, but local military leaders also established their own kingdoms, and some of the provinces declared their independence. The next few years brought a prolonged civil war among the various warlords, as well as a developing Communist party.

Stability was to some extent regained when one war leader, Chiang Kai-shek, won control over much of the country. To further solidify his rule, he hunted down and massacred members of the Communist party. As a result, the Communists, who had previously established themselves in the cities, moved out to remote peasant areas. Mao Tse-tung, at the head of the surviving elements of the Communist movement, attempted to adapt Marx’s ideas to the Chinese context, giving particular importance to the peasantry as a revolutionary force. The movement Mao led also had strong nationalist overtones, emphasizing the need to rebuild Chinese society in the face of the inroads made by both Western and Japanese influences.

The Communists became the main group resisting the Japanese invasion that occurred during the Second World War, primarily by using guerrilla tactics. The Japanese occupation during this period

The quote behind these Chinese students reads: "We are not only able to destroy the old world, we are able to build a new world instead"
—Mao Tse-tung.



threw the country back again into a state of almost complete disintegration. Following the war, the battles between the Communists and Chiang Kai-shek's followers resumed, ending in victory in 1949 for Mao's Red Army. The remnants of Chiang Kai-shek's forces moved with the aid of the American fleet to Formosa (now Taiwan).

When the new government came to power in 1949, China was on the verge of falling apart. If the Communists had not been as successful as they were in reforging national unity, China as it is today might not exist. The country could well have broken up into several states, as indeed happened to most traditional empires. There are several states now in North Africa and in the Middle East, for example, where the Ottoman Empire used to be (Dunn, 1972). The Communist government under Mao was able to build up a broad base of support by combining appeals to nationalism with very extensive rural reconstruction. Three years after the revolution, 45 percent of the cultivated land had been removed from the control of traditional landlords and distributed among 300 million peasants (Carrier, 1976).

Later, agricultural reforms were further expanded and, with the backing from the peasantry which these secured, the Communist government allowed other changes to take place. Trading, industrial,

and financial organizations were nationalized (placed under the direct control of the government). Peasants were organized into "collectives": agricultural production was no longer carried on by individual families, but by groups of workers responsible to the Communist party. Although in very recent times other important reforms have been instituted in China, involving the encouragement of individual initiative and profit making, the basic system established soon after the revolution is still in place.

THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE

As a contrasting example to the cases of Russia and China it is illuminating to look at the Cuban revolution. Cuba is a small island with a population of only some eight million people. Unlike most other less-developed countries, prior to the revolution over half of Cuba's population lived in urban areas, the majority in Havana. The country was originally a colony of Spain, and the Spanish settlers treated the native population of the island brutally. These oppressive practices, together with the ravages of epidemics brought by the Europeans, virtually wiped them out. Slaves were therefore brought over from Africa to make up a labor force working the sugar, coffee, and tobacco fields.

A young Fidel Castro leads his followers in the early stages of the Cuban Revolution (left). An older Castro looks on during a 1989 press conference with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.



As a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898 (from which the United States also gained control of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam), Spain relinquished its control over Cuba, and the island was occupied by the U.S. army. After Spain's withdrawal, a treaty was signed with the new government giving the United States extensive rights to intervene in Cuba's internal affairs and in fact the marines were sent into Cuba on several occasions.

Before long, U.S. business firms dominated the Cuban economy. Americans owned 75 percent of the cultivated land, 63 percent of the sugar industry, and all of the railroads. Sugar made up over three-quarters of Cuba's exports, most of it shipped to the United States (Boorstein, 1967). Cuba was thus extremely dependent economically on the United States, which kept the price of sugar artificially low. It has been said that "even though a Cuban flag flew over the island, the real power sign was the American dollar" (Carrier, 1976).

Over the years, Cuba had a history of unrest and unstable governments. In the early 1930s, there were a series of uprisings across the island directed at the corrupt and ineffective government. Eventually, Cuban army officers led by Fulgencio Batista took control of the government and banned elections. Batista pursued policies favorable to United States business interests, while accumulating a vast fortune for himself. But eventually elections were reintroduced, and Batista lost power in 1944. He moved then for a while to Florida, enjoying the fruits of his personal fortune, but in 1952, he returned to power by means of a military *coup d'état*.

Batista was in turn overthrown by a band of revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro—although initially it was doubtful whether Castro would become a successful military leader. Castro formed his group in Mexico and originally landed in Cuba in July 1953. The attack failed, and Castro spent a period of time in jail. After his release, he returned with another revolutionary group in December 1956. This force consisted of only eighty-two soldiers, and was spotted by Batista's air force and attacked by the army. By the end of the battle, only twenty-two revolutionaries had survived, ten of whom were captured. The other twelve, including Castro, managed to reach the Sierra Maestra in Oriente, where they started building a new guerrilla group, joined by several hundred peasants.

Although Batista sent twelve thousand soldiers into the area to crush the guerrillas, they were not successful; the guerrilla movement drew more support than before, attracting a following from the urban areas in addition to the countryside. Castro's campaigning was largely inspired by patriotic sentiments, the promise of democracy, and the need for land reform. He was not at that time closely asso-

ciated with Marxism and initially the Communist-led Popular Socialist Party in Cuba did not give active encouragement. But the party did add its support as it became apparent that the movement was gaining more and more popular approval.

Even with this support, the guerrilla forces never exceeded more than two thousand in number, deployed against an army of over forty thousand plus an air force. The revolution was successful because of the crumbling political support for the Batista government among the population at large, and defections in the armed forces themselves. Castro was able to enter Havana without a shot being fired. After Batista left the island in January 1959, the army surrendered to the guerrillas.

The proximity of Cuba to the American mainland, combined with the past history of intervention by the United States on the island, made the new revolutionary state potentially vulnerable to invasion. The dependence of the island upon sugar exports to the United States was a further brake upon the capability of the new government to consolidate its power. Castro managed to maintain control, however, with support from the Soviet Union, which was only too willing to acquire a political, and potentially a military, presence so near the American mainland. When Cuba made an agreement to sell sugar to the USSR in exchange for oil, the United States government reacted by cancelling orders for the balance of Cuba's sugar imports in 1960. The Cubans responded by nationalizing all American-owned sugar fields, together with some other industries, utilities, and railroads. Cuba in some part exchanged one form of dependence for another; trade and material support from the Soviet Union became as essential to the economy as sugar exports to the United States had been. Yet the very rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union over the fate of the island allowed Castro space enough for the creation of an effective and strong government.

Looking at the origins and nature of the Cuban revolution, we can see that caution is needed in generalizing too readily from the examples of Russia and China. The Cuban revolution did not take place against a background of war, as in the other two cases. The ideas that originally prompted the guerrilla movement that Castro led were not primarily derived from Marxism. Yet the Cuban example also allows us to identify some factors probably characteristic of most revolutions, certainly twentieth-century ones. These include the influence of nationalism; the role of intellectuals as leaders (Castro was originally a lawyer); the important part played by the peasantry; and the fact that, at some point, the existing regime loses effective control of at least a large part of the military.

THEORIES OF REVOLUTION

SINCE REVOLUTIONS HAVE BEEN FUNDAMENTAL TO SOCIAL development over the past two centuries, it is not surprising that a diversity of theories exists to try to account for them. The most influential was that of Karl Marx (1818–1883). Unlike other theorists, whose intentions were just to analyze revolutionary change, Marx also proposed his ideas as a means of furthering such change. Whatever the intrinsic validity of Marx's views, their practical importance for twentieth-century social change has been immense.

Other influential theories date from a much later time and have tried to explain both the "original" revolutions (such as the American and French) and subsequent ones. Some have cast the net even more widely, trying to analyze revolutionary activity in conjunction with other forms of rebellion or protest. We shall look at four frameworks for studying revolution: that of Marx; the theory of political violence suggested by Chalmers Johnson; the account of revolution and rising economic expectations put forward by James Davies; and the interpretation of collective protest proposed by the historical sociologist, Charles Tilly.

MARX'S THEORY

Marx's view of revolution was based on his more general interpretation of human history. According to Marx, the development of societies is marked by periodic class conflicts which, when they become acute, tend to terminate in a process of revolutionary change. Class struggles derive from the **contradictions**—unresolvable tensions—within societies. Marx traced the main source of contradiction to economic changes—changes in the "forces of production." In a stable society, there is a balance between the economic structure, social relationships, and the political system. But as the forces of production alter, contradiction is intensified, leading to open clashes between classes—which then ultimately provokes revolution. (For a lengthier discussion of Marx's ideas, see Chapter 22: "The Development of Sociological Theory.")

Marx applied this model both to feudalism of the past and to industrial capitalism of his time. The traditional, feudal societies of Europe were based on production by serfs who were ruled over by a class of landed aristocrats and gentry. Economic changes going on within these societies gave rise to towns and cities, in which trade and manu-

facture developed. This new economic system, created within feudal society, threatened its very basis. Rather than being founded upon the traditional lord-serf relationship, the emerging economic order encouraged industrialists to produce goods for sale on open markets. The contradictions between the old feudal economy and the newly emerging capitalistic one eventually became acute, taking the form of violent conflicts between the rising capitalist class and the feudal landowners. The outcome of this process was revolution, the most important example being the French Revolution of 1789. As a result of the French Revolution, and revolutionary changes that occurred in other European societies, Marx argued, the capitalist class managed to achieve dominance.

The evolution of capitalism, however, according to Marx, presented new contradictions, which would also eventually lead to revolution. Industrial capitalism is an economic order based upon the private pursuit of profit and upon competition between firms to produce and sell their products. This system creates a gulf between a rich minority, who own and control the industrial resources, and an impoverished majority of workers. Marx believed that workers and capitalists would come into more and more intense conflict with each other. Labor movements and political parties, representing the mass of the working population, would eventually mount a challenge to the rule of the capitalist class, and overthrow the existing political system. Where the position of a dominant class was particularly entrenched, Marx believed, violence was needed to bring about the required transition into socialism or communism. In other circumstances, this process might happen peacefully, using parliamentary mechanisms—a revolution (in the sense in which the term was defined earlier) would not be necessary.

Marx expected revolutions to occur in some Western countries during his lifetime. Towards the end of his life, when it became apparent that this was not to be, he turned his attention elsewhere. Interestingly, he looked particularly towards Russia. Russia, he argued, was an economically retarded society within which new forms of commerce and manufacture, borrowed from Western Europe, were being adopted. Marx thought that this was likely to create contradictions more severe than those developing within the European countries. For the introduction of novel types of production and technology into a backward society would lead to a highly explosive mixture of the old and the new. In his correspondence with Russian radicals, Marx claimed that these conditions might lead to a revolution in their country. But he added that the revolution would only be a successful one if it spread to other Western states. In these circumstances, a post-revolutionary government in Russia could take advan-

tage of the more developed economic circumstances of the rest of Europe to push forward a rapid process of modernization.

Evaluation

Contrary to Marx's expectations, revolutions failed to occur in the advanced, industrialized societies of the West. In most Western countries (the United States being a notable exception) there are socialist or communist political parties, many of which claim to be following Marx's ideas. Where they have come to power, however, they have tended to become less rather than more radical. It is possible, of course, that Marx simply got the timetable wrong and that the revolutions he anticipated will one day take place in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. But it is more plausible that Marx's predictions were at fault. The development of industrial capitalism does not lead, as Marx supposed, to more and more intense clashes between workers and capitalists.

At the same time, it does not follow from this that Marx's theory is irrelevant to the contemporary world. There is an important sense in which it *cannot* be, because it has become part of the ideals and values held both by revolutionary movements and established governments. Moreover, some of Marx's views can be adapted to make sense of Third World revolutions. The thesis he applied to Russia seems relevant to events in many peasant countries affected by the spread of industrial capitalism. Tensions are set up at the points of contact between the expansion of modern industry and traditional systems. As the traditional modes of life dissolve, those affected become a source of potentially revolutionary opposition to governments which try to preserve the old order of things.

CHALMERS JOHNSON: REVOLUTION AS "DISEQUILIBRIUM"

Marx had few cases of revolution upon which to base his analyses. Those trying to understand revolution today have more numerous historical examples to study. They can also see what impact Marx's ideas themselves have had in helping generate the momentum of revolutionary change.

The work of Chalmers Johnson is based upon ideas drawn from Talcott Parsons (Johnson, 1964, 1966). According to Parsons, societies are "self-regulating systems" that adjust to change by reordering their institutions so as to maintain a balance between them. This reordering keeps the system working effectively. The best way to un-

derstand this idea is by an analogy with the physiology of the body. When the bodily system is in working order, it is able to respond successfully to changes in its environment. If external temperature rises, for example, the body mobilizes certain mechanisms, such as the sweat glands, to keep its own temperature stable. It may happen, however, that conditions change in such a marked fashion that the whole system is thrown into disarray. If, say, the outside temperature rises too high, the mechanisms of the body would not be able to cope, and the result would be a major disturbance in the functioning of the physiological system. The bodily system at this point is in disequilibrium.

In Johnson's theory, the **disequilibrium** of societies is a necessary condition for the occurrence of revolution. The main source of disequilibrium, according to Johnson, is dislocation between the major cultural values of the society and the system of economic production. This can happen as a result of either internal or major external changes, but usually involves both. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China, for example, the traditional values of Chinese culture were placed more and more under strain by the impact of changes in the economic system brought about by Western trade and commerce. The old system of production, involving landlords and bonded peasants, began to disintegrate. The "reordering of institutions" was not enough to balance the system. Rather, the system was thrown into disequilibrium.

Once such disequilibrium has occurred, according to Johnson, many people become disoriented and look to new leaders who promise social transformation. This results in a loss of support for existing authorities. But revolution does not happen automatically at this point. If the political authorities react effectively to the situation, initiating policies that will restore equilibrium, they can avoid being overthrown. A stubborn ruling elite, however, might dig in its heels and deploy whatever armed force it has at its command to crush sources of protest, and if successful, a coercive regime or "police state" might come into being. Military force might be used in a ruthless fashion to stamp out sources of opposition, moving the whole society back in a conservative direction.

No society can be governed for long purely by the use of force. If the regime cannot persuade most of the population to re-adopt their traditional habits and attitudes, it will only be able to retain power for a short while. Once it becomes clear that the society is in fundamental disarray, the armed forces themselves become less loyal to the rulers. Several factors may hasten this process, the most important of which is defeat in war, as occurred in Russia before the 1917 Revolution, or in China during World War II. Such defeat has a

demoralizing effect upon the military, as well as inherently weakening them. Without the full support of the military, the leadership collapses into chaos. Civil war or a revolution then occurs. A new government comes to power, putting into practice reforms that bring the society back into a new form of equilibrium.

Evaluation

Johnson's theory has the merits of being clear and comprehensive. What Johnson referred to as "disequilibrium" is similar to what Marx called "contradiction." Johnson's notion may or may not be superior to Marx's, but the idea that social change sets up dislocations that cannot be handled by existing institutions, without their radical restructuring, does seem to make sense of conditions likely to lead to revolutionary transitions.

A limitation of Johnson's view is the idea that societies normally exist in some kind of natural condition of harmony or equilibrium. This is surely not so. Most societies, particularly in the modern world, have many sources of tension or dislocation built into them, without becoming prone to revolution. Moreover, Johnson paid little attention to the actual *content* of the ideas which revolutionaries pursue. People do not become revolutionaries merely because a social system is undergoing strain. We cannot understand modern revolutions without seeing the distinctive impact that calls for freedom, democracy, and equality have made in promoting impulses to create new forms of social order (Smith, 1973). Finally, Johnson's theory cannot easily account for why revolution has become so common in the modern era, but was virtually unknown previously.

JAMES DAVIES: RISING EXPECTATIONS AND REVOLUTIONS

One clue as to why revolution has become common in the modern world is to be found in the work of James Davies. Davies pointed out that during innumerable periods of history people lived in dire poverty, or were subject to extreme oppression, but did not rise up in protest. Constant poverty or deprivation does not make people into revolutionaries; rather, they tend to endure such conditions with either resignation or mute despair. Revolutions are more likely to occur when there is a *rise* in people's living conditions. Once standards of living have started consistently to go up, people's levels of expectation also rise. If improvement in actual conditions subse-

quently slows down, propensities to revolt are created because gains are less than expectations.

Thus, social protest, and ultimately revolution, tends to occur in circumstances in which there is some improvement in people's conditions of life. It is not absolute deprivation that leads to protest, but **relative deprivation**—what matters is that there is a discrepancy between the lives people are forced to lead and what they think could realistically be achieved.

Assessment

This thesis offers an understanding of the connections between revolution and modern social and economic development. The influence of ideals of progress, together with expectations of economic growth, tend to induce rising expectations, which, if then frustrated, spark protest. Such protest gains further strength from the spread of ideas of equality and democratic political participation (Davies, 1962; Brinton, 1965). An example is to be found in the very recent history of China. In the late 1970s and 1980s, reforms were introduced by the Chinese Communist party designed to induce faster economic growth. The reforms later led to demands for greater democracy, producing violent clashes between pro-democracy groups and government forces in 1989.

As Charles Tilly has pointed out, however, Davies's theory does not discuss how and why different groups *mobilize* to seek revolutionary change. Protest might well often occur against a backdrop of ris-



Part of the aftermath of the suppression of the democracy movement by Chinese troops in June 1989.

ing expectations, but to understand how protest is transformed into the potential for revolution, we need to identify how groups become collectively organized to make effective political challenges.

CHARLES TILLY'S REVOLUTION THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

In his book *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Charles Tilly attempted to analyze processes of revolutionary change in the context of an interpretation of broader forms of protest and violence. He distinguished four main components of **collective action**—action taken to contest or try to overthrow an existing social order (Tilly, 1978).

1. **ORGANIZATION.** There are many ways in which protest movements are organized, varying from spontaneous assemblies of crowds to tightly disciplined revolutionary groups. Castro's revolutionary movement in Cuba, for example, began as a small guerrilla band formed in exile in Mexico.
2. **MOBILIZATION.** This refers to the processes by which a group acquires control over the resources making collective action possible. Such resources may include supplies of material goods, political support, or weaponry. Castro was able to acquire material and moral support from a sympathetic peasantry and from many in the cities.
3. **COMMON INTERESTS.** Those engaging in collective action share what they see as the gains and losses resulting from policies or tactics they adopt. Some sort of common interests always underlie mobilization to collective action. Castro managed to weld together a broad coalition of support because many people had, or thought they had, a common interest in removing the existing government.
4. **OPPORTUNITY.** Many forms of collective action, including revolution, are greatly influenced by incidental happenings that provide opportunities for action which might not otherwise exist. Thus there was no inevitability to Castro's success, which depended upon a number of contingent factors—in the early stages,

Castro's "invasion" was almost a complete fiasco. If he had been one of the seventy captured or killed, would there have been a revolution?

Collective action, according to Tilly, can simply be defined as people acting together in pursuit of interests they share—for example, people gathering together to demonstrate in support of a cause. There may be various levels of activism among those who engage in such behavior, some being very intensively involved, others lending more passive or irregular support. To summarize, then, effective, collective action that culminates in revolution usually moves from (1) organization, to (2) mobilization, to (3) the perceiving of shared interests, and finally to (4) the occurrence of concrete opportunities to act effectively (Tilly, 1978).

Social movements, in Tilly's view, tend to develop as a means of mobilizing group resources either when people have no institutionalized means of making their voices heard, or where their needs are directly repressed by the state authorities. How far groups can secure active and effective representation within an existing political system is of key importance in determining whether their members turn to violence to achieve their ends. Collective action at some point involves open confrontation with the political authorities—"taking to the streets." However, only where such activity is backed by groups having systematic organization is it likely to have much impact upon established patterns of power.

Typical modes of collective action and protests vary with historical and cultural circumstances. In the United States today, for example, most people know how groups get together to represent their demands, and are familiar with forms of demonstration like mass marches, large assemblies, and street riots. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., carried out a historic mass demonstration with his non-violent "March to Washington" for civil rights in 1963. There are many other types of collective protest, however, which have either become less common or have disappeared altogether in most modern societies (such as fights between villages, machine breaking, or lynching). Those who form protest movements can also build on examples taken from elsewhere, modifying their own practice. For instance, guerrilla movements proliferated in various parts of the world once disaffected groups learned how successful guerrilla actions can be against regular armies.

When and why does collective action become violent? After studying a large number of incidents occurring in Western Europe since 1800, Tilly concluded that most collective violence arises from nonviolent collective action. The occurrence of violence depends not

so much on the nature of the action, as upon other forces—in particular, how the authorities respond. A good instance is the street demonstration. The vast majority of such demonstrations occur without personal or property damage. A minority lead to violence, and are then labeled in a different way—as “riots.” Sometimes, of course, the authorities step in when violence has already come about; more often, as the historical record shows, the authorities are the originators of violent action. Moreover, where violent confrontations do occur, the agents of authority are responsible for the largest share of deaths and injuries. This is not particularly surprising given the special access they have to arms and military discipline. The groups they are attempting to control, conversely, cause more property damage (Tilly, 1978).

Revolutionary movements, according to Tilly, are a type of collective action that occurs in circumstances of what he calls **multiple sovereignty**. This is a condition in which a government, for one reason or another, lacks full control over the areas it is supposed to administer. Situations of multiple sovereignty can arise as a result of external war, internal political clashes, or the two combined. Whether a revolutionary take-over of power is accomplished depends upon whether the ruling authorities maintain control over the armed forces, the existence of conflict within the ruling group, and the level of organization of the protest movement seeking to seize power.

Assessment

Tilly's work represents one of the most sophisticated attempts to analyze collective violence and revolutionary struggles. His ideas seem to have wide application, and his use of them is sensitive to the variabilities of historical time and place. Questions of the nature of the organization and social movements, the resources they are able to mobilize, and the relation between groups contending for power, are all important circumstances of revolutionary transformation.

Tilly said little, however, about the circumstances that lead to multiple sovereignty. This is so fundamental to explaining revolution that it represents a serious omission. According to Theda Skocpol, Tilly assumed that revolutionary movements are guided by the conscious and deliberate pursuit of interests; successful processes of revolutionary change occur when people manage to realize these. Skocpol, by contrast, sees revolutionary movements as more ambiguous and indecisive in their objectives. Revolutions, she emphasizes, largely emerge as unintended consequences of more partial aims toward which groups and movement strive. She writes:

The purposive image is just as misleading about the process and outcome of historical revolutions as it is about their causes. For the image strongly suggests that revolutionary processes and outcomes can be understood in terms of the activity and intentions or interests of the key group(s) who launch the revolution in the first place . . . such notions are much too simple. In fact, in historical revolutions, differently situated and motivated groups have become participants in complex unfoldings of multiple conflicts. These conflicts have been powerfully shaped and limited by existing social, economic and international conditions. And they have proceeded in different ways depending upon how each revolutionary situation emerged in the first place. (Skocpol, 1979; see also Dunn, 1985)

This judgment is just as appropriate when we think of the revolutionary changes that occurred in the East European societies in 1989, compared with earlier revolutionary episodes. The changes of 1989 are too recent for us yet to form a full understanding of them; but very few people prior to these events anticipated that they would turn out the way that they did.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

DISCUSSING THE OUTCOME OF REVOLUTIONS IS EVERY BIT AS complex as analyzing their origins. What ensues after a revolution is partly influenced by the very events that led

up to it. Following a period of revolutionary battles, a country may be economically impoverished and bitterly divided. Remnants of the defeated regime, or other groups contending for power, may regroup their forces and invade. If the attitude of surrounding states is hostile to the new government (as was the case following the 1917 Russian Revolution, for example), its success in producing desired social reconstruction may be much more limited than where they are sympathetic and prepared to lend active support. Also, there are major differences between the objectives of revolutionary governments themselves—some wish to pursue much more radical policies than others. Finally, although revolutions may have long-term consequences for the societies in which they occur, it is extremely difficult

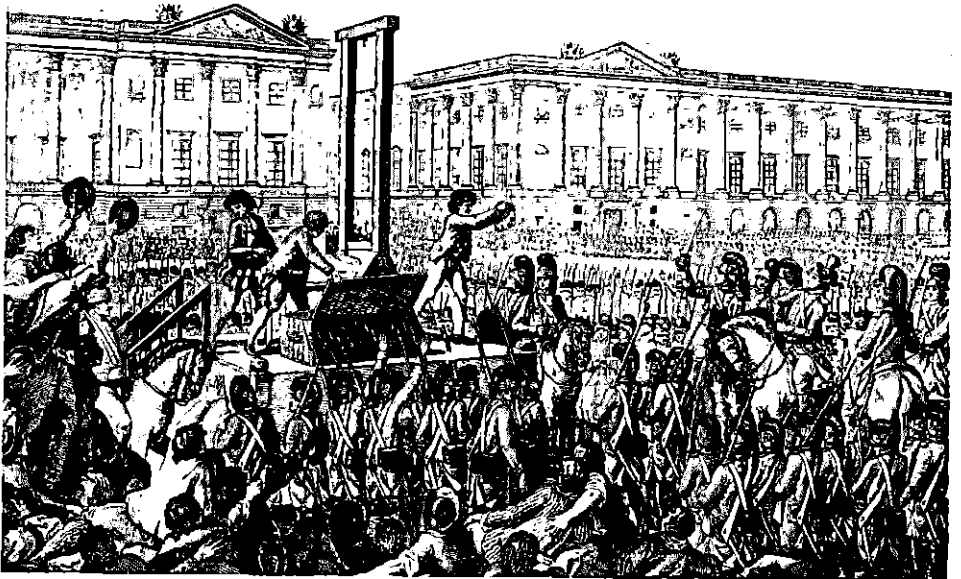
to disentangle these from other factors that affect that society's subsequent development.

SHORT-TERM CONSEQUENCES

Many revolutions are followed by a period of civil war, during which the incoming regime must bring about the military defeat of those who contest its position and claims. Revolutions tend to occur in circumstances in which the authority of a government has been radically undermined, and several movements may be competing to replace it. Some of these might be militarily strong enough to continue the fight against the new government, or receive funding from other nations supporting their cause. This was the case in the Russian, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions, although the degree of opposition they faced varied—Russia was actually invaded by Western forces to assist those loyal to the old regime.

Revolutions are made in the name of freedom, but they are often succeeded by a period in which there is severe social repression. This was not true of the American Revolution and there are other exceptions too. More commonly, however, revolutions have been succeeded by periods of widespread arbitrary imprisonment, executions,

The Reign of Terror during the French Revolution included the execution of King Louis XVI in January 1793.



and rigid censorship. The use of the term **revolutionary terror** to mean the systematic application of violence in order to induce obedience to the new authorities was first developed to describe the aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789 (see Chapter 10: "Politics, Government, and the State"). Large numbers of people deemed to be supporters of the old regime, or enemies of the revolution, were hunted down and publicly executed by guillotine.

Where they occur, such episodes tend to happen some years after the assumption of power by the new regime, rather than immediately. The reason is that there is usually a period of "settling down" before a revolutionary government tries to implement the radical new program it might be proposing. At this point, resistance either from supporters of the preceding regime, or other dissident groups, is likely to combine with opposition generated by the new policies which the authorities put into practice. In the Soviet Union, for example, Stalin pursued a vigorous policy of setting up collective farms, in the face of widespread resistance from the peasants. In this process, and in the purges of dissident groups, many people lost their lives or were transported to labor camps. It has been estimated that 5 percent of the Soviet population was arrested at this period (Kesselman et al., 1987). These events happened, however, more than a decade after the revolution itself.

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

We can attempt to assess the long-term impact of revolution by contrasting societies that resemble one another save for the fact that some have experienced revolutions while others have not. For example, we can compare the development of China over the past forty years with that of India. Each country freed itself from direct Western influence at about the same time, but where China experienced a revolution, India did not. India had been under British colonial rule, but a strong protest movement, led by the nonviolent Mahatma Gandhi, caused much disruption and brought about British withdrawal without a revolution.

But since China's revolution and India's independence, the two societies have developed quite differently. In China, the Communist party established a strong, centralized government, imposing strict censorship upon the press and other media. India, by contrast, has a representative parliament based on the Western model, with multi-party elections. The level of political freedom in China is well below that of India. This is measured by the diversity of views which can be publicly expressed, and by types of political organization that can be

Through nonviolent civil disobedience, Mahatma Gandhi (right), along with Jawaharlal Nehru, led the independence movement that freed colonial India from British rule in 1947.



legally formed. On the other hand, China has made far more progress in reducing extreme poverty, eliminating official corruption, and in providing health and welfare facilities. The level of literacy is much higher in China than in India. Estimates of Chinese economic development vary widely, but it is generally agreed that the growth rate in China in the fifteen years following the revolution was higher than that of India and well ahead of population expansion—also unlike India. Agrarian reform was also much more successful in China than in India, the Chinese having broken the power of the rich landlords and distributing the land to the peasantry (Bergmann, 1977).

Neither India nor China has experienced a particularly stable process of development. In India, the central government has struggled to maintain control in a country where regional divisions remain pronounced. Between 1966 and 1968 the “Cultural Revolution” threw China into turmoil. During this period, millions of mostly young people sought to reimpose “proletarian values” upon professional, managerial workers and party officials whom they believed were ignoring the teachings of the revolution. Today, this process has been replaced by one which is in some ways its opposite: the Chinese government is currently emphasizing the need for “capitalist” mechanisms of personal incentive and profit in an effort to improve the efficiency of agricultural and industrial production. It is not entirely clear as yet how successful these new policies have been on the eco-

nomic level. As mentioned earlier, in the political sphere they helped unleash major conflicts and tensions.

At this point, we turn from the study of revolutions, and their consequences, to other forms of uprising and protest. We shall separate out, and look at the nature of, two aspects of revolutionary activity: the organizing of individuals into crowds or mobs on the one hand, and the formation of social movements on the other. While these often appear together in other situations as well as in revolutions—as, for instance during the Civil Rights Movement (see Chapter 8: “Ethnicity and Race”) in the 1960s and early 1970s—they also may be quite separate. Some kinds of crowd activity, such as the actions of lynch mobs in the southern United States in past years, are not closely bound up with a social movement.

CROWDS, RIOTS, AND OTHER FORMS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

ALL REVOLUTIONS INVOLVE COLLECTIVE ACTION. BUT, AS Tilly's theory indicates, such action is found in many other circumstances besides those of revolutionary

change. Collective action can occur wherever there is the chance of large numbers of people gathering together. The development of modern cities, where many people live in close proximity, offers ample opportunities to take protests “to the streets.” The protest actions of urban groups are one example of **crowd activities**. A crowd is any relatively sizable collection of people who act in concert with one another in a public place. Crowds are an everyday part of urban life in one sense. We speak of a “crowded” shopping mall, or a “crowded” theater or amusement park, for instance, meaning that many people are jostling together in a physically confined space. These are individuals in circumstances of unfocused interaction (see Chapter 4: “Social Interaction and Everyday Life”). They are physically present in the same setting, and aware of one another's presence, but are broken up into many small knots of people going their own separate ways. However, in some situations—in a demonstration, riot, or panic—everyone's actions become bound up with those of all the others. The situation suddenly becomes one of focused interaction, because, however temporarily, the crowd starts acting as a single unit. Crowd action in this sense has stimulated the interests of sociologists and historians for many years—in fact, ever since the French Revolution of 1789.

LE BON'S THEORY OF CROWD ACTION

One of the most influential early studies of crowd action was Gustave Le Bon's book *The Crowd*, first published in 1895. Le Bon's work was stimulated by his studies of the revolutionary mobs during the French Revolution. In Le Bon's view, people act differently when caught up in the collective emotion of a crowd situation than they do in isolation. Under the influence of a **focused crowd**, individuals are capable of acts of barbarism, and of heroism, which they would not contemplate alone. The French revolutionary mobs that stormed the Bastille, for example, did so apparently regardless of the casualties they suffered. On the other hand, street crowds in 1789 also carried out numerous savageries.

What happens to produce this effect in crowd situations? According to Le Bon, when involved in the collective excitement generated by crowds, people temporarily lose some of the critical, reasoning faculties they are able to display in everyday life. They become highly suggestible and easily swayed by the exhortations of mob leaders or demagogues. Under the influence of the crowd, individuals regress to more "primitive" types of reaction than they would ordinarily produce. As Le Bon wrote, "Isolated, a person may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings" (Le Bon, 1960; orig. pub. 1895).

Although many subsequent authors have drawn upon Le Bon's ideas, we should treat them in historical context. Le Bon wrote as a conservative critic of democracy. He saw the French Revolution as signaling the opening of an era in which "crowds" (i.e., the mass of the ordinary population) would dominate their rightful rulers. Large groups, including parliamentary assemblies in Le Bon's eyes, cannot make rational decisions. They are liable to be as swayed by mass emotion, fashion, or whim, as street crowds are. Le Bon felt that democratic institutions would bring out the more primitive reactions of human beings, swamping the higher, more "civilized" faculties.

Some of Le Bon's ideas, however, at least regarding street crowds, do seem valid. The massing of large numbers of people together, in some circumstances, can generate an irrational, collective emotionality and produce unusual types of activity. Audiences have sometimes "gone wild" at pop concerts or rioted at sports events. When gripped by panic, people sometimes rush madly for safety, trampling others to death. Mobs have on occasion rampaged through the streets, beating up or killing those they see as their enemies—as happened, for example, in attacks upon the Jews in Nazi Germany.

RATIONAL ASPECTS OF CROWD ACTION

Yet most forms of crowd behavior are more discriminating and “rational” than in Le Bon’s portrayal. Those engaging in collective action are often more clearly aware of their aims than Le Bon supposed. Nor do crowds always consist mainly of people already prone to behave irresponsibly—the criminal riffraff—as Le Bon suggested. Inal riffraff—as Le Bon suggested. George Rudé’s studies of the French Revolution show that most of the 660 people killed in the mob that stormed the Bastille were “respectable” individuals who held orthodox occupations, not criminals or vagabonds (Rudé, 1959). Research into the urban riots of the 1960s in black neighborhoods in the United States showed that most rioters were not drawn from criminal elements, or even from people on social welfare. The average rioter was a man with a blue-collar job, more likely to be well informed about social and political issues, and to be involved in civil-rights activities, than other urban blacks. Moreover, although the rioting appeared haphazard, virtually all of the property attacked or looted was white-owned (U.S. Riot Commission, 1968).

Some authors have suggested that most crowd activities become intelligible when a quite opposite interpretation is put upon them to that given by Le Bon. Thus Richard Berk (1974) has argued that the activities of individuals in crowds are best understood as logical responses to specific situations. The gathering of crowds often offers opportunities to achieve aims at little personal cost. In crowd situations, individuals are relatively anonymous and can escape detection for acts that would otherwise result in their imprisonment—for instance, looting a store. When acting as a crowd, individuals temporarily have far more power than they have as isolated citizens (Turner and Killian, 1972).

Could this interpretation be applied to situations in which extreme violence towards innocent people is involved—say, to actions by lynch mobs in the South? The lynching of blacks was at one time a frequent occurrence. Following the Civil War, “nigger hunts” were regularly undertaken, in which freed slaves were sought out and put to death. Between 1889 and 1899, over 1,800 lynchings were reported—since some no doubt went unrecorded, the actual number was probably considerably higher (Cantril, 1963). The burning of blacks’ homes, torture, and mutilation, were also carried out by mobs. It might seem as though only the view offered by Le Bon could make sense of such actions, and no doubt some of the features of mob violence that he identified are relevant. But there were some “rational” aspects to the lynchings. Those involved were usually semi-organized vigilante groups who saw themselves as having a righteous



In scenes such as the one on the left, people at a sports event act "irrationally" (Le Bon's idea), crushing others to escape a collapsed grandstand behind them (not in photo). These should be distinguished from others, in which crowds, often socially or politically motivated, act "rationally" (Berk's thesis), like in the French student uprising in May 1968 (right).

cause. Taking action as a mob reduced their individual responsibility for the events, while publicly proclaiming their fury at the freeing of the slaves. The violence also served as a means of social control upon blacks, emphasizing to the black population as a whole that the passing of a law in the North did not change the reality of white power in the South. It could be argued that, when in focused crowds, to some extent people are able to overcome the usual forms of social control; the power and anonymity of the crowd allows them to act as they might normally wish to, but feel unable to.

Mob action and rioting—as Tilly emphasizes—characteristically express the frustrations of people who cannot gain access to orthodox channels to express grievances or press for reforms. Ruling authorities of all types have always feared mob activity, not just because of the direct threat it poses, but because it gives a public and tangible form to felt social injustices. Even though some riots may on the surface seem abortive, giving rise to wanton destruction and loss of life, they may stimulate change and produce at least some desired benefits. For an example of this, one need only examine the spate of riots in black areas of cities, like Watts in Los Angeles, in the 1960s. These riots forced the white communities to pay attention to the deprivations blacks suffered and led to the creation of a number of new reform programs.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

BESIDES THOSE ENGAGED IN REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY, A wide variety of other social movements, some long-enduring, some which melt away almost overnight, have existed in modern societies. Social movements are as evident a feature of the contemporary world as are the formal, bureaucratic organizations they often oppose.

DEFINING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A **social movement** may be defined as *a collective attempt to further a common interest, or secure a common goal, through collective action outside the sphere of established institutions*. The definition has to be a broad one because of the variations between different types of movements. Many social movements are very small, numbering perhaps no more than a few dozen members; others might include thousands, or even millions, within their membership. Some movements carry on their activities within the laws of the society or societies in which they exist, while others operate as illegal or underground groups. Often, of course, laws are altered partly or wholly as a result of the action of social movements. For example, workers who organized strikes a century ago were engaging in illegal activity, punished with varying degrees of severity in different countries. Eventually, however, the laws were amended making strikes a permissible tactic of industrial conflict. Other modes of economic protest, by contrast, still remain outside the law in most countries—such as sit-ins in factories or workplaces.

The dividing lines between social movements and formal organizations are sometimes blurred, because movements that become well established usually take on bureaucratic characteristics. Social movements may thus in the course of time become formal organizations, while—less frequently—organizations may dissolve into social movements. The Salvation Army (a religious group concerned with humanitarian social causes), for example, began as a social movement, but has now taken on most of the characteristics of a more permanent organization. An example of the opposite process would be the case of a political party which is banned by a nation's leadership and forced to go underground, perhaps to become a guerrilla movement working outside the established political institutions.

Similarly, it is not always easy to separate social movements from **interest groups**. Interest groups are associations set up to influence government policymakers in ways that will favor their members. An example of an interest group would be the National Rifle Association, which lobbies to defend the interests of gun owners. But is the antinuclear coalition, which regularly lobbies against nuclear power, an interest group or part of a more wide-ranging mass movement? No clear-cut answer can be given in such a case; social movements often actively lobby for their causes through official channels while also engaging in more unorthodox and sometimes illegal forms of activity.

CLASSIFYING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Many different categories of social movements have been proposed. Perhaps the most comprehensive classification is that developed by David Aberle some quarter of a century ago (1966). Aberle distinguishes four types of movement. The first two, transformative and reformative movements, are concerned primarily with securing changes in society. The other two types, redemptive and alterative, are aimed at changing the habits or outlook of individuals.

Transformative movements aim at thorough-going change in the society or societies of which they are a part. The changes their members anticipate are cataclysmic, all-embracing, and often violent. Examples are revolutionary movements or some radical religious movements. Many millenarian movements (movements that anticipate the arrival of an era of religious salvation), for instance, have foreseen a more or less complete restructuring of society when the time of deliverance is at hand.

Reformative movements have more limited objectives, aspiring to alter only partial aspects of the existing social order. They concern themselves with specific kinds of inequality or injustice. Cases in point are movements against racism or anti-abortionist groups.

Redemptive movements seek to rescue individuals from ways of life seen as corrupting. Many religious movements belong in this category, in so far as they concentrate upon personal salvation. Examples are the Pentecostal sects, which propose that individuals' spiritual capacities and development are the true test of their worth (Schwartz, 1970).

Finally, there are the somewhat clumsily titled **alterative movements**, which aim at securing partial change in individuals. They do not aim at achieving a complete alteration in people's habits, but are

concerned with changing certain specific traits. An illustration is Alcoholics Anonymous.

THEORIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Theories of revolution inevitably tend to overlap with those of social movements. Charles Tilly's emphasis upon "resource mobilization," for example, has been applied to social movements, as has James Davies' interpretation of rising expectations and protest. Two additional theoretical perspectives on social movements, however, have been particularly important. These are the approaches of Neil Smelser and Alain Touraine.

Neil Smelser: Six Conditions for Social Movements

Neil Smelser (1963) distinguished six conditions underlying the origins of collective action in general, and social movements in particular. *Structural conduciveness* refers to the general social conditions promoting or inhibiting the formation of social movements of different types. For example, in Smelser's view, the sociopolitical system of the United States leaves open certain avenues of mobilization for protest because of the relative absence of state regulation in those areas. Thus there is no official state-sponsored religion. People are free to exercise their religious beliefs. This makes for a conducive environment in which religious movements might compete for individuals, so long as they do not transgress criminal or civil law.

Just because the conditions are conducive to the development of a social movement does not mean those conditions will bring them into being. There must be *structural strain*—tensions (or, in Marx's terminology, contradictions) that produce conflicting interests within societies. Uncertainties, anxieties, ambiguities, or direct clashes of goals, are expressions of such strains. Sources of strain may be quite general, or specific to particular situations. Thus sustained inequalities between ethnic groups give rise to overall tensions; these may become focused in the shape of specific conflicts when, say, blacks begin to move into a previously all-white area.

The third condition Smelser outlined is the spread of *generalized beliefs*. Social movements do not develop simply as responses to vaguely felt anxieties or hostilities. They are shaped by the influence of definite ideologies, which crystallize grievances and suggest courses of action that might be pursued to remedy them. Revolutionary movements, for instance, are based on ideas about why injustice occurs and how it can be alleviated by political struggle.

Precipitating factors are events or incidents that actually trigger direct action by those who become involved in the movement. In 1955, when a black woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, her action helped spark the Civil Rights Movement (see Chapter 8: "Ethnicity and Race").

The first four conditions combined, Smelser argued, might occasionally lead to street disturbances or outbreaks of violence. But such incidents do not lead to the development of social movements unless there is a coordinated group that becomes mobilized for action. *Leadership* and some means of *regular communication* among participants, together with funding and material resources, are necessary for a social movement to exist.

Finally, the manner in which a social movement develops is strongly influenced by the *operation of social control*. The governing authorities may respond to initial protests by intervening in the conditions of conduciveness and strain that stimulated the emergence of the movement. For instance, in a situation of ethnic tension, steps might be taken to reduce ethnic inequality that generated resentment and conflict. Other important aspects of social control concerns the responses of the police or armed forces. A harsh reaction might encourage further protest and help solidify the movement. Also, doubt and divisions within the police and military can be crucial in deciding the outcome of confrontations with revolutionary movements.

Smelser's model is useful for analyzing the sequences in the development of social movements, and collective action in general. According to Smelser, each stage in the sequence "adds value" to the overall outcome; also, each stage is a condition for the occurrence of the next one. But there are some critical comments that can be made about Smelser's theory. Some social movements become strong without any particular precipitating incidents. Conversely, a series of incidents might bring home the need to establish a movement to change the circumstances that gave rise to them. Also, a movement itself might create strains, rather than develop in response to them. For example, the women's movement has actively sought to identify and combat gender inequalities where previously these had gone unquestioned. Smelser's theory treats social movements as *responses* to situations, rather than allowing that their members might spontaneously organize to achieve desired social changes. In this respect his ideas contrast with the approach developed by Alain Touraine.

Alain Touraine: From Historicity to Fields of Action

Alain Touraine (1977, 1981) developed his analysis of social movements on the basis of four main ideas. The first, which he called

historicity, explains why there are so many more movements in the modern world than there were in earlier times. In modern societies individuals and groups know that social activism can be used to achieve social goals and reshape society.

Second, Touraine focused on the *rational objectives* of social movements. Such movements do not just come about as irrational responses to social divisions or injustices; rather, they develop from specific views and rational strategies as to how injustices can be overcome.

Third, Touraine saw a process of *interaction* in the shaping of social movements. Movements do not develop in isolation; instead, they develop in deliberate antagonism with established organizations, and sometimes with other rival social movements. All social movements have interests or aims that they are *for*; all have views and ideas they are *against*. In Touraine's view, other theories of social movements (including that of Smelser) have given insufficient consideration as to how the objectives of a social movement are shaped by encounters with others holding divergent positions, as well as by the ways in which they themselves influence the outlooks and action of their opponents. For instance, the objectives and outlook of the women's movement have been shaped in opposition to the male-dominated institutions that it seeks to alter. The goals and outlook of the movement have shifted in relation to its successes and failures, and have also influenced the perspectives of men. These changed perspectives in turn stimulated a reorientation in women's movements, and so the process of shaping and reshaping continues.

Fourth, social movements and change occur in the context of what Touraine called **fields of action**. A field of action refers to the connections between a social movement and the forces or influences against it. The process of mutual negotiation among antagonists in a field of action may lead to the social changes sought by the movement as well as to changes in the social movement itself and in its antagonists. In either circumstance the movement may evaporate—or become institutionalized as a permanent organization. For example the labor-union movements became formal organizations when they achieved the right to strike and types of bargaining acceptable to both workers and employers. These changes in both the movement and the original worker-owner relationship were forged out of earlier processes involving widespread violent confrontation on both sides. Where there are continuing sources of conflict (as in the case of the relation between unions and employers) new movements still tend to reemerge.

Touraine's analysis can also be applied to movements concerned primarily with individual change—Aberle's redemptive and alterative categories—even though Touraine himself has said little about

them. For instance, Alcoholics Anonymous is a movement based upon medical findings about the harmful effects of alcohol upon people's health and social activities. The movement itself has been shaped by its own opposition to advertising designed to encourage alcoholic drinking, and by its attempt to confront the outside pressures faced by alcoholics in a society in which drinking is easily tolerated.



Touraine's analysis helps us see that social movements have a double interest for the sociologist. They provide a subject matter for study but, more than this, they help shift the ways in which sociologists *look at* the areas of behavior they try to analyze. The women's movement, for instance, is not just relevant to sociology because it provides material for research investigation. It has identified weaknesses in established frameworks of sociological thought, and has used concepts (such as patriarchy) that help clarify issues of gender and power. There is a continuing dialogue not only between social movements and the organizations they confront, but between social movements and sociology itself.

SUMMARY

1. Revolutions have occurred in many areas of the world over the past two centuries. The American Revolution of 1776, and the French Revolution of 1789, introduced ideals and aspirations that have come to be widespread in political life. In the twentieth century, most revolutions have been inspired by socialist or Marxist aspirations, particularly in developing countries.
2. *Revolution* is a slippery concept to define. To count as a revolution a process of political change must involve the influence of a mass social movement that is prepared to use violence to achieve its ends and able to seize power and subsequently initiate reform.
3. Of the various theories of revolution, Marx's interpretation is particularly significant, not just because of its intellectual contribution—which can be questioned in various ways—but because it has served in some part to shape actual processes of revolution in the current century.
4. Since revolution is such a complex phenomenon, generalizing about the conditions leading to revolutionary change is diffi-

cult. Most revolutions occur in circumstances where governmental power has become fragmented (for instance, as a result of war), and an oppressed group has been able to create and sustain a mass movement. Revolutions are usually unintended consequences of more partial aims towards which movements initially strive.

5. Post-revolutionary regimes are often authoritarian, imposing censorship and other social controls. Revolutions normally have long-term consequences for the societies in which they occur, although it is difficult to disentangle these from other factors that affect the subsequent development of those societies.
6. Crowd activities occur not only in revolutions, but in many other circumstances of less dramatic social change—as in urban riots. The actions of rioting mobs might seem wholly destructive and haphazard, but often serve definite purposes for those involved.
7. Many types of social movement are found in modern societies. Social movements are a collective attempt to further common interests through collaborative action outside the sphere of established institutions. Sociology not only studies such movements but also responds to the issues they raise.

BASIC CONCEPTS

REVOLUTION
 REBELLION
 COLLECTIVE ACTION
 SOCIAL MOVEMENT

IMPORTANT TERMS

DEMOCRACY	FOCUSED CROWD
COUP D'ÉTAT	INTEREST GROUP
CONTRADICTION	TRANSFORMATIVE MOVEMENT
DISEQUILIBRIUM	REFORMATIVE MOVEMENT
RELATIVE DEPRIVATION	REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT
MOBILIZATION	ALTERNATIVE MOVEMENT
MULTIPLE SOVEREIGNTY	HISTORICITY
REVOLUTIONARY TERROR	FIELD OF ACTION
CROWD ACTIVITY	